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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000087

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BASRAH YOUTH - ANGRY AND FRUSTRATED

REF: (A) BASRAH 84 (B) BAGHDAD 1745

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CLASSIFIED BY: Mark F. Marrano, Deputy Regional Coordinator,
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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary. In a series of meetings with political, religious and youth leaders in Basrah over the past month, the Deputy Regional Coordinator (DRC) discussed the attitudes of the local youth towards the Coalition Forces (CF). A combination of unemployment, dashed hopes, religious and militia influence all appear to be pushing the youth of Basrah to increasingly challenge and confront Coalition Forces with violence. The recent clashes between local youth and the British military during the past month clearly show that local frustration has reached the boiling point. To improve the attitude of the youth of Basrah toward the CF, security must be restored to Basrah and economic opportunities that are readily attainable must be created to counteract the influence of hard line religious clerics and militia leaders. End Summary.

Students

12. (C) Issam Khadim, President of the Students Union at Shat Al Arab University, stated on May 16 that students are generally frustrated and angry with the Coalition Forces for not intervening enough in Basrah to "punish those causing the violence." He expressed frustration with the Islamic groups that frequent the universities. Khadim mentioned that after the fall of Saddam, religious leaders from Sadr, Badr and Fadheela went to all the universities in Basrah to recruit and influence the students. He added that these religious leaders tried to change the nature of the union to make it more political.

13. (C) Khadim stated that at Shat Al Arab University there are constantly people from different political parties handing out pamphlets. He described the 2,000 students at his university as liberal, open minded and becoming increasingly frustrated with the current security situation and the Coalition Forces. Khadim added that the students on the other larger main campus of Basrah University are a "lost cause" because different political and religious groups have heavily influenced them. Specifically, he mentioned that Iran has been using Badr in the universities as a way to spread its influence.

14. (C) Provincial Council member Dr. Hamid Al Thalimi of the Iraqi National Accord voiced the same opinion on April 24. He stated that the USG needs to focus on the students in the universities in order to counter the influence of the religious

hard liners. Dr. Al Thalmi suggested that the USG not take a direct approach, but rather work through non-governmental organizations (NGO's) to quietly influence the students towards a more positive, open-minded approach with regards to the United States. When asked for more details, Dr. Al Thalmi said he did not know exactly how the USG could accomplish this only that it should be looked at more carefully by the USG.

Street Kids

15. (C) Sayed Ghali, Provincial Council and Iraqi National Accord member, stated on April 27 that local youths between 12-20 years old who are unemployed and without direction are the most susceptible to militia and religious leaders. He pointed to Sayed Al Shuhada Movement, a well-known political party in Basrah with strong links to Iran, as one political group that concentrates their recruitment efforts on these youths. Ghali stressed that more work needs to be done with getting the kids off the streets and into sports programs.

16. (C) Also on April 27, the Assistant to the Governor of Basrah, Rajeh Al Musawi, highlighted the dashed hopes of the average kid in the street. He stated that the youth of Basrah had very high expectations with regards to the Coalition Forces.

According to Al Musawi, the arrival of the Coalition Forces in Basrah signaled for the local youth a new era of economic opportunity and higher standard of living. However, three years later, they do not consider their lives are any better, nor do they see any good prospects for the future. Al Musawi stressed that it would be easy to change their negative opinion of the Coalition Forces by reaching out with more reconstruction projects, even small scale ones. He added that some projects done by the British 60 years ago still have a lingering good effect on the older generation in Basrah. On the other hand, Said Youssef, the Head of Thar'allah in Basrah, stated on May 14 that something "big" needs to happen to calm the anger of the youth. He suggested that the removal of the Governor by the British military or by the Provincial Council through the voting

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process would help to alleviate some anger.

17. (C) Provincial Council member and Shiite cleric, Sayed Bahaa Jama al Deen, echoed the same sentiments on May 23. He stated that many local youth are extremely frustrated with being unable to find a job and the lack of basic services. Sayed Bahaa added that some political groups and militias are taking advantage of this frustration by channeling it towards the Coalition Forces. The Chief of Police, Hasan al Swaidi, stated on April 25 that the frustration has reached such levels that the only way to control it is for the British military to increase their visibility with more patrols. He opined that this was the only way to dampen the desire of the local youth to make trouble.

18. (C) Comment: Clearly there are local leaders willing to take advantage of the poor security situation for their own respective agendas. It may be too late to radically change local youth opinion at this point since it appears that the religious and political groups have been allowed the time and freedom to exert their respective influences. Perhaps the best approach now would be to focus on restoring security to Basrah to dissipate some of the current anger and frustration felt by the youth and create an environment conducive to the development of new economic opportunities (see refs A and B) End Comment.
MARRANO